

British Jews object to ultra-Orthodox sect's decree banning women from driving

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CANTERBURY, England (RNS) Two prominent leaders of England's Jewish community and a representative of the chief rabbi have joined in repudiating rabbis from an ultra-Orthodox Jewish sect in London that have banned women from driving.

Rabbis from the small Belz community have decreed that as of August children would not be allowed to study if their mothers drive them to school.

The decree was motivated out of a desire to keep "the traditional rules of modesty in our camp," the rabbis said, according to a report in *The Jewish Chronicle*.

The ban has stunned most Jews in England, who number around 280,000, and the British government has begun an investigation into whether the Belz community is breaching independent schools standards.

Nicky Morgan, education secretary, described the decree as "completely unacceptable in modern Britain."

But pushback has also come from the larger Jewish community.

"I find the whole thing abhorrent," said Ella Marks, former president of the League of Jewish Women. "This is not good for the image of Anglo-Jewry."

Laura Janner-Klausner, senior rabbi of the Reform Jewish movement, added: "This is not normative Judaism. Hopefully the decision to stop women driving will be reversed. It's unsustainable and comes from a place called fear—fear of the changing world."

A representative of the office of England's chief rabbi issued a statement saying the Belz decree was "entirely removed from mainstream Jewish practice."